

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 002938

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DEPT FOR NEA, PRM AND H

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/04/2012

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SUBJECT: STAFFDEL BODLANDER AND MAKOVSKY: MONITORING UNRWA  
301(C) CERTIFICATION IN THE WEST BANK

Classified By: DCM Greg Berry, per 1.5 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) In a May 30 visit to UNRWA's West Bank field, House International Relations Committee Staffers Deborah Bodlander and Alan Makovsky investigated UNRWA's compliance with section 301(c) of the Foreign Assistance Act (which prohibits UNRWA from using any USG assistance to provide services to terrorists), as well as the continued relevance of UNRWA's mandate fifty-four years after the original Palestinian refugee crisis. They also visited Jenin refugee camp to inspect damages incurred during the April battle in the camp.

The staffers met with UNRWA West Bank field director Richard Cook, deputy director Guy Siri, special assistant for emergency programs Patrick Barbieri and public information officer Sami Mshasha. They were accompanied by regional refugee coordinator Joan Polaschik and ConGen poloff Elizabeth Sallies.

¶2. (U) West Bank Director Cook told the staffers that only 25 percent of UNRWA's 600,000 registered refugees in the West Bank reside in refugee camps. Most of the West Bank camps are quite small (the largest has only 20,000 residents) and vary in nature from a small neighborhood within a larger urban area (such as Jenin refugee camp or Shu'fat camp, located within East Jerusalem) to stand-alone rural villages (Fawwar camp). Cook explained that the camp boundaries are delineated only on maps and that the only visible sign on the ground of where camps begin and end may be the quality of housing in a particular area. Cook noted that UNRWA does not administer or police the camps, but only provides services within the camps to registered refugees. Cook added that, under the current emergency circumstances, UNRWA provides services to some non-refugees, such as emergency health care, or food and water to areas that were isolated for extended periods. (In a separate meeting with refcoord, UNRWA's Director of Relief Services in the West Bank confirmed that UNRWA's non-medical assistance to non-refugees is limited only to food assistance, and constitutes no more than 12 percent of UNRWA's overall emergency food aid programs in the West Bank. UNRWA does not provide direct cash support to non-refugees.)

¶3. (U) In response to a question from the staffers, Cook explained that camp committees (originally established by the PLO and now elected by camp residents, according to a representative social and political mix for that specific camp) are UNRWA's key interlocutors within the camps. While they do not administer the camps (civil administration is the responsibility of local government -- either Palestinian or Israeli), the camp committees are the primary vehicle for UNRWA officials and camp residents to exchange views. Cook reported that he meets regularly with all West Bank camp committees, and uses the occasion to reinforce UNRWA policies, including those on the neutrality of all UNRWA facilities.

¶4. (U) Cook told the staffers that Israeli authorities never have approached UNRWA with allegations that its West Bank facilities have been misused by terrorists. Although the Israeli press has carried such allegations, including charges that an UNRWA warehouse in Balata refugee camp had been used to stockpile weapons, Cook reported that the allegations "simply are not true." He said UNRWA does not even have a warehouse or other storage facility in Balata camp.

¶5. (C) Cook reported that UNRWA has a number of clear policies and procedures in place to ensure that its facilities are not misused and that its staff are not engaged in illegal activities. He reported that any UNRWA staff member found in violation of these policies is punished. In addition, any UNRWA employee who has been convicted of a crime receives administrative punishment from UNRWA, which varies with the severity of the crime. In a recent example, UNRWA summarily dismissed a staff member convicted of murder and refused to reinstate him after his sentence was commuted.

With regard to UNRWA facilities, UNRWA international staff conduct unannounced, unscheduled visits to all 160 UNRWA facilities in the West Bank every six months. During the visits, UNRWA international staff complete a comprehensive inspection of the facilities, opening all cabinets, unlocking all doors, and ensuring that all UNRWA facilities are properly identified (signposted, flags flying). Refcoord

noted that UNRWA Headquarters' Audit and Inspection Department also conducts similar unannounced, unscheduled visits to UNRWA facilities, in addition to their regular audits of UNRWA programs.

16. (C) Cook reported that UNRWA also has a number of clear policies and procedures in place to ensure that known terrorists or convicted criminals do not receive UNRWA assistance. For example, UNRWA policy is not to rebuild the homes of suicide bombers destroyed by the IDF or damaged in "work accidents." Cook told the staffers that in early May, two refugee shelters in Balata camp were destroyed by a "work accident." UNRWA refused the families' request for assistance in rebuilding the shelters. However, UNRWA as a general policy provides emergency humanitarian relief (blankets, tents) to refugees in dire need of shelter, including those whose homes have been damaged in work accidents or destroyed by the IDF following a suicide bombing. In this particular instance, UNRWA provided emergency assistance to the families of the would-be bombmakers. Cook said that, due to its humanitarian mandate, UNRWA could not refuse such basic needs to the families of refugees engaged in illicit activities.

17. (SBU) Cook emphasized that UNRWA utilizes a system of stringent criteria and well-trained social workers to ensure that only qualified, non-criminal refugees receive relief assistance from UNRWA. Before the current crisis began in September 2000, only 8,000 refugee families -- five percent of the West Bank refugee population -- received UNRWA's "special hardship" assistance of food rations and some direct cash assistance. Today, 98,000 families receive food assistance from UNRWA. Cook assured the staffers that UNRWA makes every effort to ensure refugees involved in illicit activity do not receive UNRWA services. For example, any refugee serving a prison term is removed from UNRWA's special hardship rolls, and his/her family's assistance is subsequently reduced. The staffers questioned Cook on the procedures used by UNRWA to inform refugees of the penalties and risks of involvement in terrorism, and suggested that UNRWA could do a better job of informing refugees of the cuts in services associated with involvement in illicit activity. They said it would be helpful if UNRWA would reiterate its relief policies in writing. They also pressed UNRWA to institute similar policies to ensure that convicted criminals do not receive health or education services.

18. (SBU) Finally, the staffers noted that some members of Congress have suggested that UN Security Council Resolutions governing the presence of armed elements in civilian refugee camps may apply to UNRWA, especially those resolutions requiring the UNSYG to report to the Security Council any information regarding armed elements in UN camps. While the staffers acknowledged that the applicability of these resolutions to UNRWA may be unclear, they urged UNRWA to do everything possible to encourage an atmosphere of nonviolence within Palestinian refugee camps. They pressed UNRWA to develop standard policies and procedures for handling information regarding illicit activities in the camps (e.g., how and to whom to report the information). Cook said that he personally was not sure whether such policies currently existed, but was certain that UNRWA would be willing to investigate the possibility of instituting such a policy.

19. (U) ConGen Jerusalem cleared this message.

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